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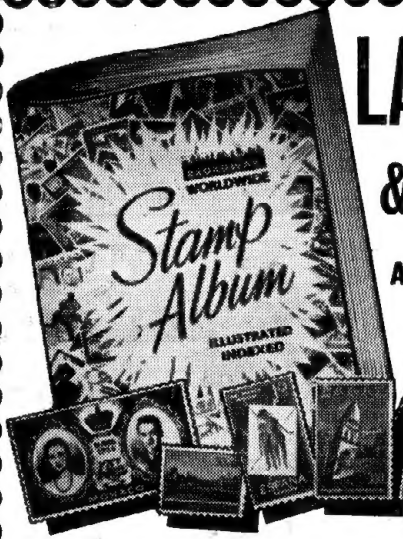

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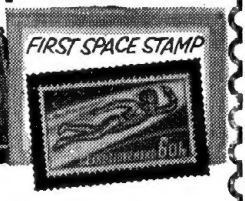

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CLAWS of the TIGER

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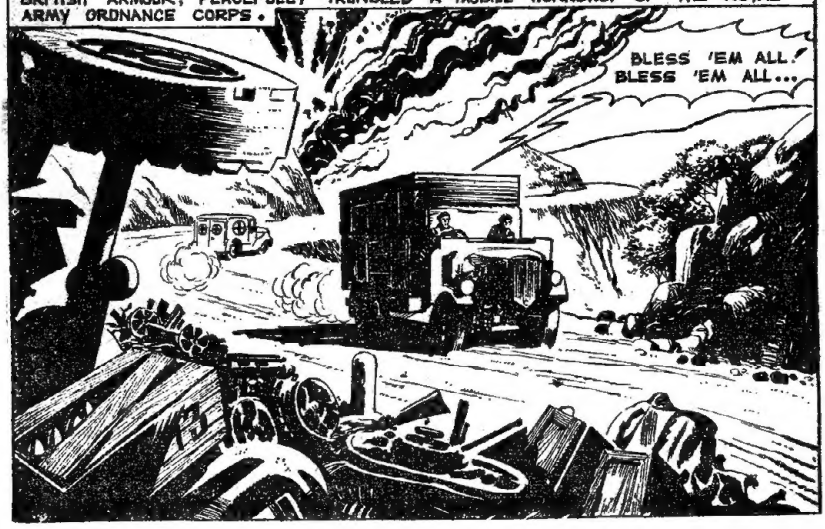
Chapter 1. THE FRIGHTENED SERGEANT

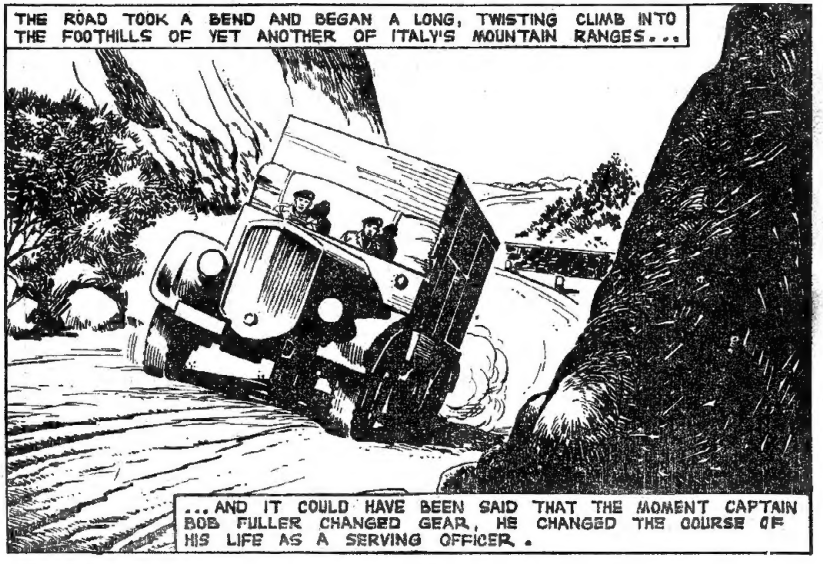
WITHIN THREE DAYS, A TEN-MILE BEACHHEAD HAD BEEN WRESTED FROM THE ENEMY'S CLUTCHES. THE ALLIES WERE ON THE ROAD TO ROME - BUT BEFORE THEM STOOD A STUBBORN GERMAN WEHRMACHT.

ALONG THAT SAME ROAD AND FOLLOWING HARD IN THE CHURNED IMPRINTS OF BRITISH ARMOUR, PEACEFULLY TRUNDLED A MOBILE WORKSHOP OF THE ROYAL ARMY ORDNANCE CORPS.



LISTENING WITH A GRIN TO HIS CHEERY MEN IN THE BACK OF THE TRUCK WAS CAPTAIN BOB FULLER, IN CHARGE OF THE REPAIR SECTION.
THEY THINK THEY'LL SOON BE IN BLIGHTY, HARRIS... BUT I WONDER...
AYE, OLD JERRY AIN'T BEATEN YET, SIR.

NO SUCH CAUTION ENTERED THE MINDS OF THE OPTIMISTIC REPAIR CREW...
HOME BY EASTER, BERT - YOU MARK MY WORDS.

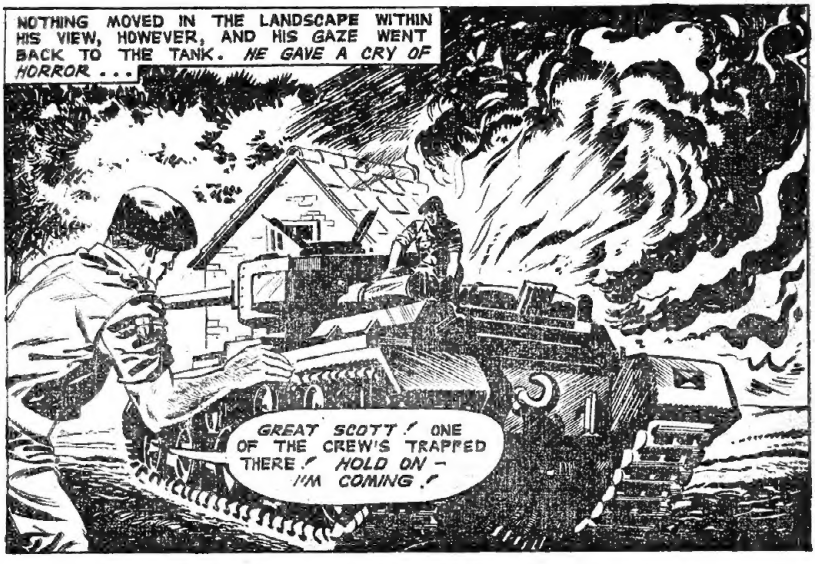

THE ROAD TOOK A BEND AND BEGAN A LONG, TWISTING CLIMB INTO THE FOOTHILLS OF YET ANOTHER OF ITALY'S MOUNTAIN RANGES...
...AND IT COULD HAVE BEEN SAID THAT THE MOMENT CAPTAIN BOB FULLER CHANGED GEAR, HE CHANGED THE COURSE OF HIS LIFE AS A SERVING OFFICER.

FOR THERE SUDDENLY APPEARED THE STUMBLING, BREATHLESS FIGURE OF A BRITISH SERGEANT IN GREASY BATTLEDRESS AND BLACK BERET...
HULLO, A BLOKE IN THE TANK CORPS... WHAT'S THE PANIC ?

THE MAN HALTED AT SIGHT OF THE TRUCK AND YELLED SOMETHING WHICH WAS LOST IN THE WHINE OF BOB'S GEAR-CHANGE.
WHAT DID HE SAY ? HE LOOKS SCARED STIFF !

THE OFFICER BRAKED THE HEAVY TRUCK AND SPRANG DOWN AS IT SHUDDERED TO A STOP. BUT THE TANK SERGEANT HAD TAKEN TO HIS HEELS.
LOOK AT 'IM RUN !
WHAT'S BITTEN HIM ?

A RISING CLOUD OF BLACK SMOKE DREW BOB'S ATTENTION AND HE SCRAMBLED TO THE TOP OF THE BANK. HE STIFFENED WHEN HE SAW WHAT WAS BURNING AND HIS EYES SWIFTLY SCANNED THE LOCALITY.
A TANK BREWING UP! WHAT DID IT - SHELL, MINE - OR PERHAPS EVEN A JERRY TANK?


NOTHING MOVED IN THE LANDSCAPE WITHIN HIS VIEW, HOWEVER, AND HIS GAZE WENT BACK TO THE TANK. HE GAVE A CRY OF HORROR...
GREAT SCOTT! ONE OF THE CREW'S TRAPPED THERE! HOLD ON - I'M COMING!

FLAMES LICKED OUT OF THE BLAZING TANK AND THE HEAT HIT THE YOUNG CAPTAIN LIKE A WALL AS HE SPRANG TO THE TURRET. HE GRASPED THE GROANING CREWMAN WHOSE CLOTHES WERE ALREADY SMOULDERING . . .

I'VE GOT YOU... HUP.

A-AAGH!

SCORCHED AND HALF CHOKED HIMSELF, BOB DRAGGED THE SUFFERING MAN TO SAFETY AND SLAPPED AT THE BURNING CLOTHING. WORDS CAME GASPINGLY FROM THE TANKMAN . . .

TIGER TANK...AMBUSH...MY MATES ALL KILLED!

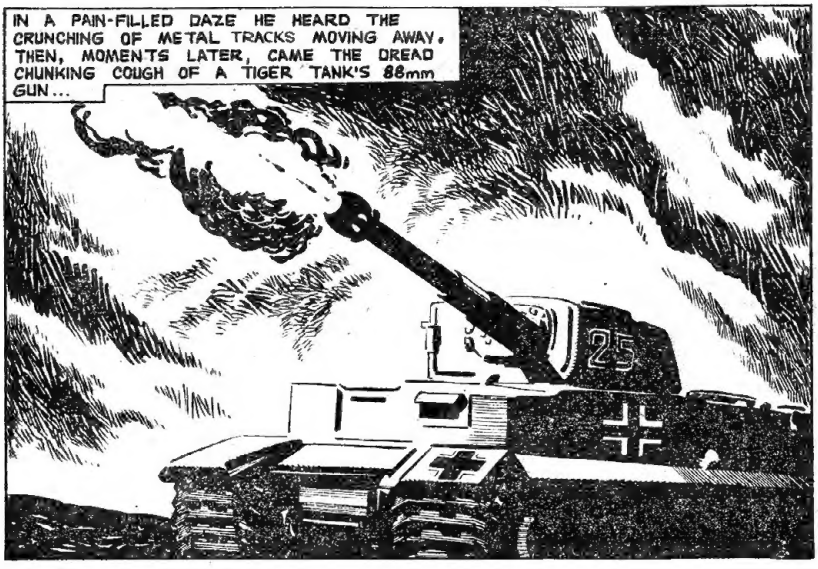
ALL KILLED?

BOB'S MIND FLASHED TO THE RUNAWAY SERGEANT. DID THAT FRIGHTENED FUGITIVE KNOW HE HAD DESERTED A STILL LIVING FELLOW CREWMAN?

THE OFFICER WAS JUST ABOUT TO QUESTION THE MAN FURTHER WHEN A SPANDAU MACHINE-GUN CLATTERED VICIOUSLY INTO LIFE FROM CLOSE AT HAND . . .

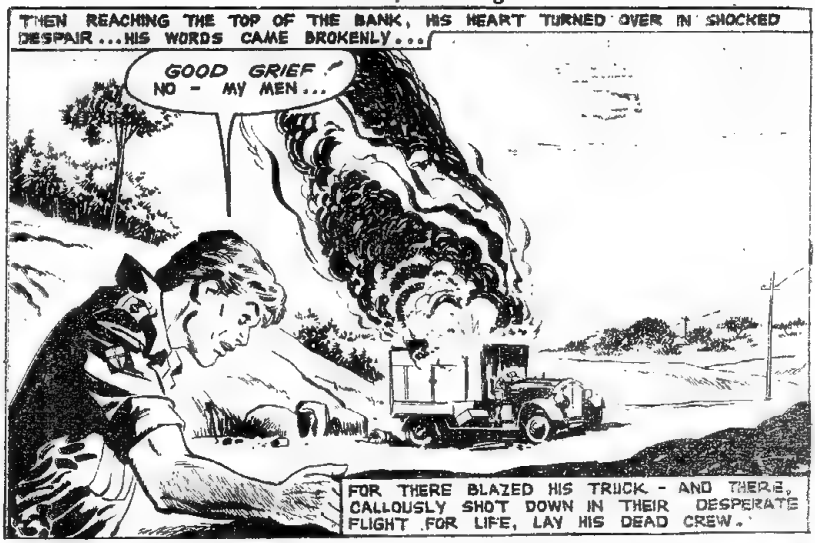
BLAZES! THE TIGER!

BULLETS LASHED THE HOLLOW WHERE THEY CROUCHED AND TORE THE GUNNER FROM BOB'S GRASP. HE HIMSELF WAS FLUNG HELPLESSLY TO ONE SIDE AS A BURST HIT HIS SHOULDER...
AAGH!
25
EVEN IN THAT FIRST SEARING AGONY HE KNEW THE GUNNER MUST HAVE BEEN KILLED INSTANTLY.


IN A PAIN-FILLED DAZE HE HEARD THE CRUNCHING OF METAL TRACKS MOVING AWAY. THEN, MOMENTS LATER, CAME THE DREAD CHUNKING COUGH OF A TIGER TANK'S 88mm GUN...
25

BOB HEARD THE IMPACT OF THE SHELL ON SOMETHING METALLIC AND THEN THE SHRILL CRIES OF MEN. THE SICKENING TRUTH HIT HIM LIKE A HAMMER BLOW...
THE TRUCK! HARRIS...TURNER!

DIZZY FROM HIS RAW WOUND BUT DRIVEN ON BY A DREADFUL FOREBODING, BOB CLAWED HIS WAY TOWARDS THE ROAD. AGAIN THE OMINOUS CRACKLE OF FLAMES REACHED HIS EARS...
MUST GET...TO THE TRUCK!


THEN REACHING THE TOP OF THE BANK, HIS HEART TURNED OVER IN SHOCKED DESPAIR ...HIS WORDS CAME BROKENLY...
GOOD GRIEF ! NO - MY MEN...
FOR THERE BLAZED HIS TRUCK - AND THERE, CALLOUSLY SHOT DOWN IN THEIR DESPERATE FLIGHT FOR LIFE, LAY HIS DEAD CREW.

A BRITISH SCOUT CAR FOUND THE DELIRIOUS YOUNG CAPTAIN AND RUSHED HIM TO BASE HOSPITAL. THERE, AS HE RECOVERED, THE CRACKLE OF FLAMES NEVER SEEMED TO BE OUT OF HIS EARS NOR THE DYING CRIES OF HIS MEN - AND EVER BEFORE HIS EYES DANCED A HAUNTING VISION - *THE RUNAWAY SERGEANT'S FEAR-STRICKEN FACE* !
WAS IT THE KIND OF FEAR WHICH CAN HIT THE BRAVEST MEN...OR WAS IT RANK COWARDICE ? IF ONLY THAT TANK CREWMAN HAD LIVED ...

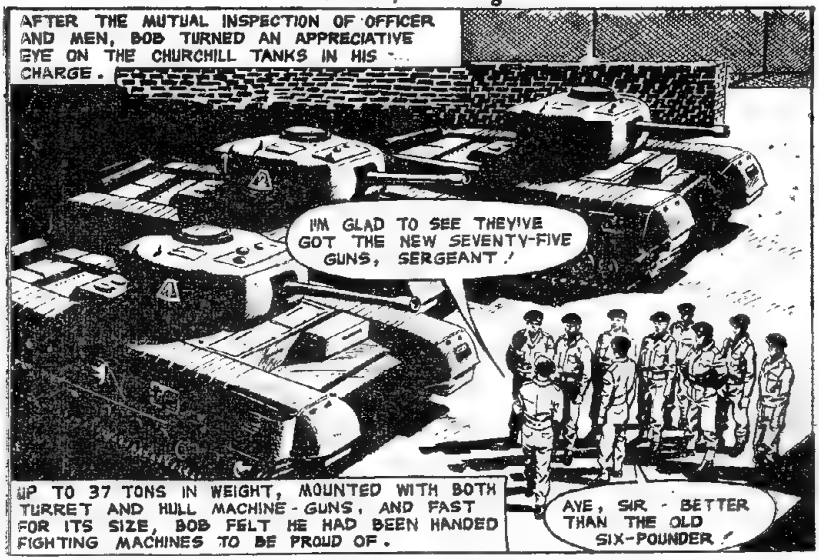
FROM THIS DARK BROODING EMERGED AN IRON-HARD RESOLUTION. WHEN BOB'S OWN COLONEL VISITED HIM ONE DAY, HE MADE HIS REQUEST...
I WANT TO TRANSFER, SIR - TO A COMBATANT REGIMENT. I-I FEEL I'VE GOT TO HIT BACK AT THOSE MURDERING JERRIES.
I UNDERSTAND, FULLER. BUT FIRST IT'S ENGLAND FOR YOU, MY BOY - FOR FINAL TREATMENT.
WELL, SO LONG AS IT'S SWIFT, SIR.
BEFORE HE LEFT, THE SENIOR MAN SPOKE A WORD OF CAUTION...
YOU REALISE THAT AS A COMBATANT YOU MAY GET HURT ALL OVER AGAIN.
I'VE THOUGHT OF THAT, SIR - AND I'D STILL LIKE TO TRANSFER.
BOB WAS SENT TO CONVALESCE IN ENGLAND. WHEN HE WAS FINALLY PASSED FIT, HE LOST NO TIME IN PRESENTING HIMSELF BEFORE A SELECTION BOARD FOR TRANSFER TO A COMBATANT UNIT. IN TIME, HE HEARD THE DECISION...
...AND BEARING IN MIND YOUR ENGINEERING QUALIFICATIONS, WE CONSIDER YOU SUITABLE FOR THE ARMOURED SIDE.
HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TANKS, CAPTAIN?
VERY MUCH, SIR. THANK YOU.

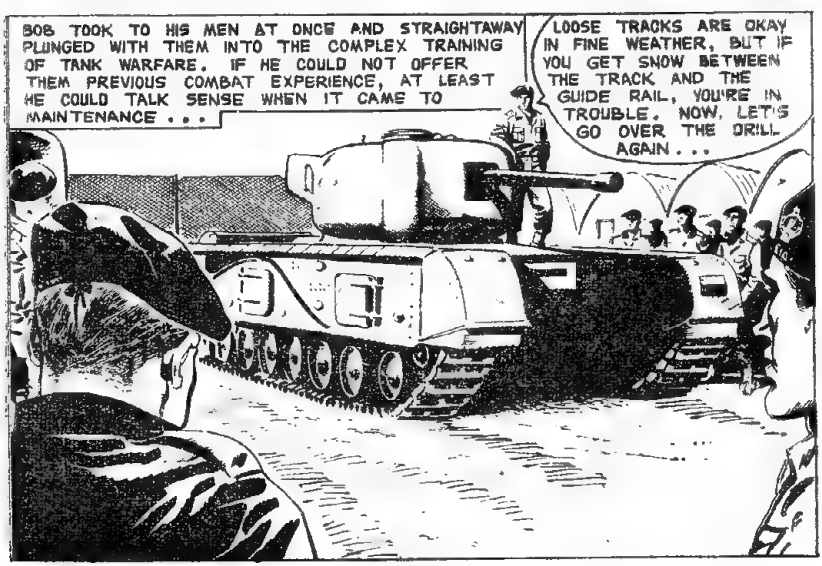
SO IT WAS WITH RATHER GRIM SATISFACTION THAT BOB FULLER SHED THE ROLE OF A NON-COMBATANT AND EMERGED FROM A TRAINING COURSE TO JOIN AN ARMOURED UNIT IN SUSSEX. THERE HE MET HIS COMMANDING OFFICER, COLONEL SUMMERS...
WE'RE GLAD TO HAVE YOU, FULLER. THERE IS MUCH YET TO BE DONE IN PREPARATION AND PRACTICAL TRAINING. WE'RE PUTTING YOU WITH 'A' SQUADRON. I THINK YOU'LL LIKE MAJOR FOSSET.
THANK YOU, SIR.
R.A.C.

BOB WAS INTRODUCED TO MAJOR FOSSET AND WAS GLAD TO RECOGNISE A SEASONED VETERAN. THE STEADY-EYED MAN HAD PROBABLY FORGOTTEN MORE ABOUT TANK-FIGHTING THAN HE WOULD EVER LEARN.
FULLER IS FROM THE R.A.O.C. SHOULD BE A USEFUL MAN, MAJOR.
GOOD! EVER WORKED ON CHURCHILL TANKS?
YES, SIR, QUITE A BIT.
R.A.C.

THE MAJOR DID NOT WASTE WORDS...
WELL, YOU'VE GOT YOUR OWN CHURCHILLS NOW, CAPTAIN. WE'RE GIVING YOU TROOP FOUR. BETTER GET ACQUAINTED.
VERY GOOD, SIR!
THEY'RE ALL BEGINNERS LIKE YOURSELF, FULLER, SO YOU WON'T FEEL AT A DISADVANTAGE.

BOB WALKED OVER TO HIS NEW COMMAND. UP TILL THEN, THEY HAD BEEN FIRMLY IN THE CHARGE OF A YOUNG SCOTTISH SERGEANT.
THE NAME'S McKAY, SIR - WELCOME TO FOUR TROOP!
THANK YOU, SERGEANT. WILL YOU PARADE THE MEN FOR INSPECTION, PLEASE?
BOB FELT THAT A FORMAL INSPECTION SHOULD SET THE RIGHT TONE - AND SOMETHING TOLD HIM THAT IN SERGEANT McKAY HE HAD A VALUABLE ASSET.


AFTER THE MUTUAL INSPECTION OF OFFICER AND MEN, BOB TURNED AN APPRECIATIVE EYE ON THE CHURCHILL TANKS IN HIS CHARGE.
I'M GLAD TO SEE THEY'VE GOT THE NEW SEVENTY-FIVE GUNS, SERGEANT!
UP TO 37 TONS IN WEIGHT, MOUNTED WITH BOTH TURRET AND HULL MACHINE-GUNS, AND FAST FOR ITS SIZE, BOB FELT HE HAD BEEN HANDED FIGHTING MACHINES TO BE PROUD OF.
AYE, SIR - BETTER THAN THE OLD SIX-POUNDER!


BOB TOOK TO HIS MEN AT ONCE AND STRAIGHTAWAY PLUNGED WITH THEM INTO THE COMPLEX TRAINING OF TANK WARFARE. IF HE COULD NOT OFFER THEM PREVIOUS COMBAT EXPERIENCE, AT LEAST HE COULD TALK SENSE WHEN IT CAME TO MAINTENANCE . . .
LOOSE TRACKS ARE OKAY IN FINE WEATHER, BUT IF YOU GET SNOW BETWEEN THE TRACK AND THE GUIDE RAIL, YOU'RE IN TROUBLE. NOW, LET'S GO OVER THE DRILL AGAIN . . .

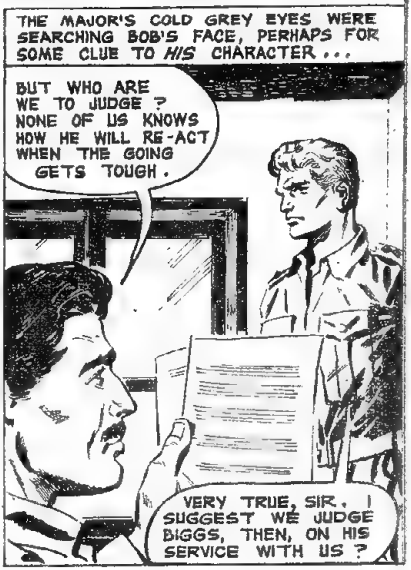
WHEN FOUR TROOP WAS MADE UP TO STRENGTH, BOB FULLER WAS ISSUED WITH THE TANKS' REGISTERED TITLES...
THIS ONE WILL BE 'WHIPPER'... SERGEANT McKAY'S WILL BE 'WATCHER'.... AND MINE WILL BE 'WARRIOR'.
PRETTY GOOD NAMES FOR TANKS, SIR.
THE CORPORAL OF 'WHIPPER' WAS ONE OF THE REINFORCEMENTS YET TO REPORT.

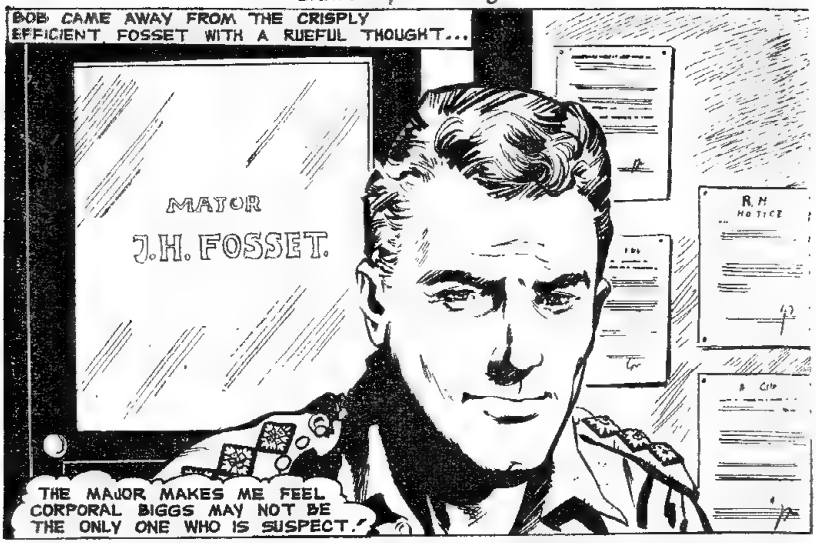
THAT MORNING, THE NEW N.C.O. ARRIVED...AND BOB STARED AT HIM IN AMAZED RECOGNITION...
CORPORAL BIGGS REPORTING FOR DUTY, SIR.
GREAT SCOTT! IT'S THE SAME MAN.

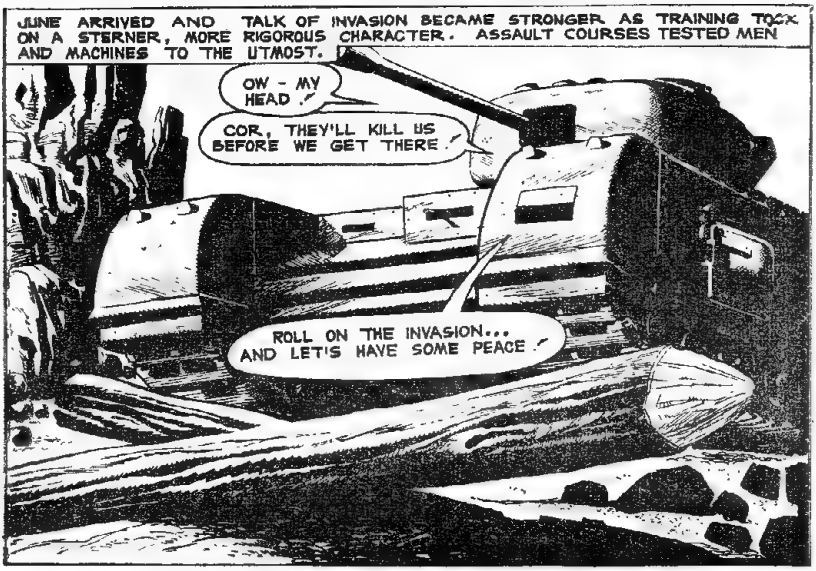
THERE WAS NO MISTAKING HIM - IT WAS THE RUNAWAY SERGEANT - BUT NOW HE WAS A CORPORAL.
IS THIS THE SET-UP, SIR ? SAME OLD CHURCHILLS !
THAT'S RIGHT, BIGGS.
RUNAWAY HE MIGHT HAVE BEEN - BUT HE'S GOT ENOUGH BOUNCE NOW !
THE REST OF FOUR TROOP RECEIVED CORPORAL BIGGS WITH SOME RESPECT. AFTER ALL, HE HAD SEEN ACTION, AS THE NEW COMMANDER OF 'WHIPPER' WAS QUICK TO REMIND THEM . . .
TOBRUK, TUNIS, SICILY, ITALY... I'VE SEEN IT ALL, MATES. TAKE MERSA MATRUH - NOW THAT WAS A HOT ONE . . .
THE LISTENING SERGEANT McKAY, HIMSELF A NEWCOMER TO TANKS, FELT DISTURBED AT HAVING A 'VETERAN' IN THEIR MIDST.

BOB MENTIONED HIS MEMORIES OF CORPORAL BIGGS TO NO ONE AND IT WAS MAJOR FOSSET WHO FIRST RAISED THE SUBJECT OF THE NEW TANK COMMANDER...
SEEMS THIS BIGGS WAS ONCE A SERGEANT, FULLER ? A COURT-MARTIAL, PERHAPS ?
MAYBE, SIR - BUT HIS PAPERS HAVEN'T REACHED US YET.

FOSSET LOOKED UP SHREWDLY AT BOB FULLER...
I CAN'T SAY I LIKE THE LOOKS OF THAT MAN - HE TALKS TOO MUCH OF ACTIONS HE'S SEEN.
POSSIBLY, SIR.


THE MAJOR'S COLD GREY EYES WERE SEARCHING BOB'S FACE, PERHAPS FOR SOME CLUE TO *HIS* CHARACTER...
BUT WHO ARE WE TO JUDGE ? NONE OF US KNOWS HOW HE WILL RE-ACT WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH.
VERY TRUE, SIR. I SUGGEST WE JUDGE BIGGS, THEN, ON HIS SERVICE WITH US ?


BOB CAME AWAY FROM THE CRISPLY EFFICIENT FOSSET WITH A RUEFUL THOUGHT...
MAJOR
J.H. FOSSET.
THE MAJOR MAKES ME FEEL CORPORAL BIGGS MAY NOT BE THE ONLY ONE WHO IS SUSPECT.


JUNE ARRIVED AND TALK OF INVASION BECAME STRONGER AS TRAINING TOOK ON A STERNER, MORE RIGOROUS CHARACTER. ASSAULT COURSES TESTED MEN AND MACHINES TO THE UTMOST.
OW - MY HEAD.
COR, THEY'LL KILL US BEFORE WE GET THERE.
ROLL ON THE INVASION... AND LET'S HAVE SOME PEACE.

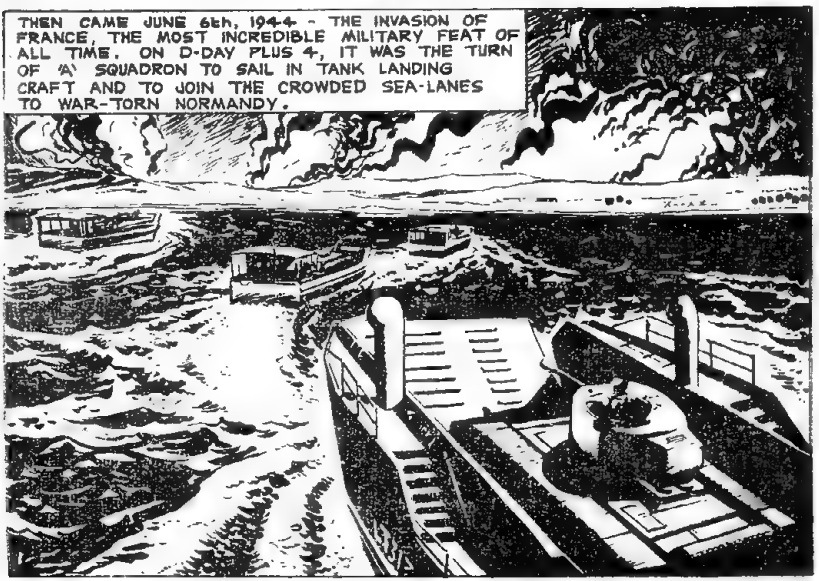
ALL THE WHILE CORPORAL BIGGS WAS BECOMING MORE AND MORE A DISTURBING INFLUENCE OVER THE REST OF THE TROOP TO SERGEANT McKAY'S INTENSE ANNOYANCE . . .
IF YOU'D DONE THIS AT REGGIO, SARGE, YOU'D HAVE BEEN A SITTING DUCK. YOU'LL NEVER MOVE HER FROM THERE.
WILL YE SHUT YOUR TRAP, CORPORAL BIGGS.

BOB FULLER TOOK IN THE SCENE AT A GLANCE AND INTERRUPTED CURTLY FOR HE, TOO, WAS LOSING PATIENCE WITH THE ALL-KNOWING BIGGS . . .
YOU'RE WRONG, CORPORAL - THERE IS A WAY OF MOVING THIS TANK.
NOT WITHOUT TOWING, SIR. IN MY EXPERIENCE . . .
TO BLAZES WITH YOUR EXPERIENCE!

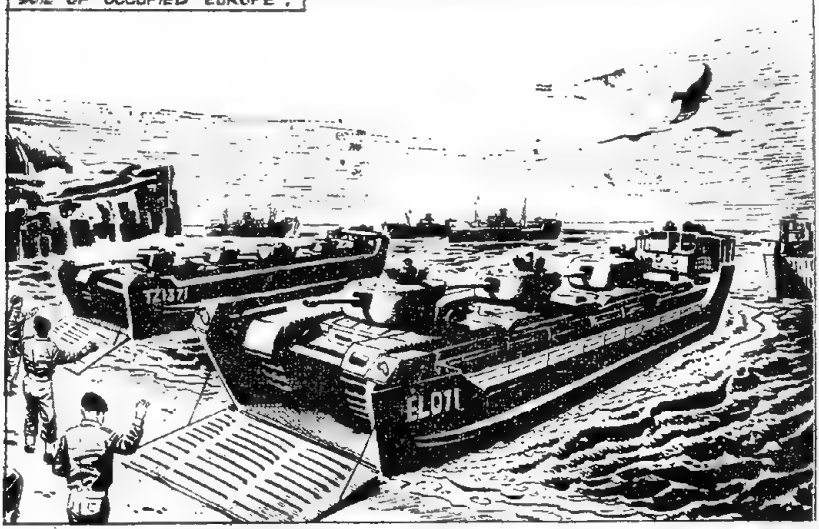
THIS WAS ONE OCCASION WHERE BOB WAS DOUBLY GLAD OF HIS ENGINEERING KNOW-HOW. IF HE HAD NEVER FOUGHT IN CHURCHILLS, AT LEAST HE KNEW THEIR CAPABILITIES . . .
McKAY, REV HER UP, AND SWING THE TILLER BAR FROM SIDE TO SIDE . . . KEEP AT IT.
I'LL TRY IT, SIR.
THIS TRICK HAD THE TRACKS GRINDING FORWARDS AND BACKWARDS IN OPPOSING DIRECTIONS.

THE RESULT WAS THAT McKAY'S WATCHER SOON SQUIRMED FREE AND MOUNTED THE BANK. BOB LOOKED AFTER THE SULKY-LOOKING BIGGS WITH A FROWN . . .
I'LL HAVE TO CUT THAT BIGGS DOWN TO SIZE OR HE'LL BE RUNNING THE TROOP FOR ME!

MOVEMENT ORDERS ARRIVED AND "A" SQUADRON MOVED SOUTH TO A TRANSIT POINT ON THE SOLENT. SHIPS MASSED FOR THE IMMINENT INVASION, GAVE THE TANKMEN A TREMENDOUS IMPRESSION OF POWER.
ME FOR THE QUEEN MARY...
GARN! YOU'LL GO IN A BLOOMIN' L.C.T., MATE - AND LUMP IT!


THEN CAME JUNE 6th, 1944 - THE INVASION OF FRANCE, THE MOST INCREDIBLE MILITARY FEAT OF ALL TIME. ON D-DAY PLUS 4, IT WAS THE TURN OF 'A' SQUADRON TO SAIL IN TANK LANDING CRAFT AND TO JOIN THE CROWDED SEA-LANES TO WAR-TORN NORMANDY.

THE LANDING WAS UNOPPOSED FOR THE BEACHHEAD HAD ALREADY BEEN ESTABLISHED. AT LAST, THE TANKS LUMBERED DOWN THE RAMPS ON TO THE SOIL OF OCCUPIED EUROPE.



FOLLOWING THE POSTED SIGNS, FOUR TROOP PUSHED ON INLAND AND BY THE AFTERNOON HAD JOINED UP WITH THE REST OF 'A' SQUADRON. MAJOR FOSSET GAVE THEM THE POSITION...

THE INFANTRY, ALREADY AT GRIPS WITH A SAVAGELY-RESISTING ENEMY, WERE STORMING TOWARDS SHELL-BLASTED CAEN...

THE FIRST REAL SCRAP FOR FOSSET'S SQUADRON CAME AT VILLERS BOCAGE WHERE THEY WERE CALLED UPON TO WINKLE ENEMY ARMOUR OUT OF A HILL-TOP SPINNEY. FOUR TROOP WAS TO ATTACK THEIR FLANK AND FOR THE FIRST TIME, BOB GAVE BATTLE-ORDERS IN EARNEST...
FIRE!

WITH COMMENDABLE COOLNESS, BOB'S GUNNERS EXCHANGED A FIRST CRASHING GUN DUEL WITH GERMAN TANKS, DISTRACTING THEM FROM THE FRONTAL ATTACK WHICH NOW ADDED TO THE ENEMY'S CONFUSION.

FOUR TROOP THUS BEGAN ITS TALLY OF ENEMY DESTROYED. BUT AS BOB CAME AWAY FROM CONGRATULATING HIS MEN, HE OVERHEARD CORPORAL BIGGS' OFF-HAND TONES...
SURE, THAT'S NOT A BAD START BUT WAIT TILL YOU MEET A TIGER TANK.
FRIEND BIGGS KNOWS IT ALL - BUT I WONDER....

BOB EYED THE CORPORAL SPECULATIVELY...
WHAT DID HAPPEN THAT TIME IN ITALY - DID HE RUN? AS THE MAJOR SAYS, HE TALKS BIG AND THAT MAY BE A COVER...

Chapter 2. CLASH BY NIGHT

BY THE AUTUMN, THE ALLIES HAD TRAPPED AND SMASHED THE GERMAN 7Ëh ARMY AND WERE PUSHING ON FOR THE RIVER SEINE. MAJOR FOSSET'S PROBLEM WAS TO GET TO GRIPS WITH AN ENEMY WHO FOREVER FOUGHT A SKILFUL REARGUARD ACTION. THE CHIEF PROBLEM WAS GERMAN MOBILE ANTI-TANK GUNS...

EVERYONE IN 'A' SQUADRON WANTED TO MIX IT WITH THE ENEMY ARMOUR. FOUR TROOP FOUND THEM ALL RIGHT BUT NOT IN THE WAY THEY EXPECTED. ONE NIGHT MAJOR FOSSET HAD A JOB FOR THEM... AND PINPOINTED A FARMHOUSE ON THE MAP...
CAPTAIN FULLER, I WANT YOUR TROOP TO ACT AS NIGHTWATCHMAN TO THIS FARM BUILDING. ENEMY TANKS MIGHT TRY TO SNEAK IN AND USE IT AS COVER AGAINST OUR INFANTRY ADVANCING AT DAWN TOMORROW.
I UNDERSTAND, SIR.

FOUR TROOP FOUND THE FARM, DARK AND SOLITARY, STANDING DESERTED IN NO-MAN'S LAND. BOB BEGAN TO STATION HIS TANKS...
EARS AND EYES ON THE TOP LINE, SERGEANT - ESPECIALLY IN THAT DIRECTION.
VERY GOOD, SIR.

THEN BOB WENT OFF WITH WHIPPER TO ANOTHER POINT . . .
YOU, BIGGS, WILL WATCH THIS ROAD. NO NOISE, MIND - AND A SHARP LOOKOUT !
ALL NIGHT, SIR - WITHOUT RELIEF ?
THAT'S RIGHT, CORPORAL - AND DON'T LET ME CATCH ANYONE ASLEEP .
BOB SENSED THAT BIGGS WAS NERVOUS. WHEN HE LEFT, HE SAW THE CORPORAL DISAPPEAR INTO HIS HATCH LIKE A RABBIT. IT WORRIED THE YOUNG CAPTAIN .

BOB STATIONED HIS OWN TANK, WARRIOR, TO COVER THE REMAINING APPROACH TO THE FARM .
FUNNY HOW YOU KEEP HEARING THINGS, SIR .
IT'S ALWAYS THE WAY AT NIGHT, COLES .

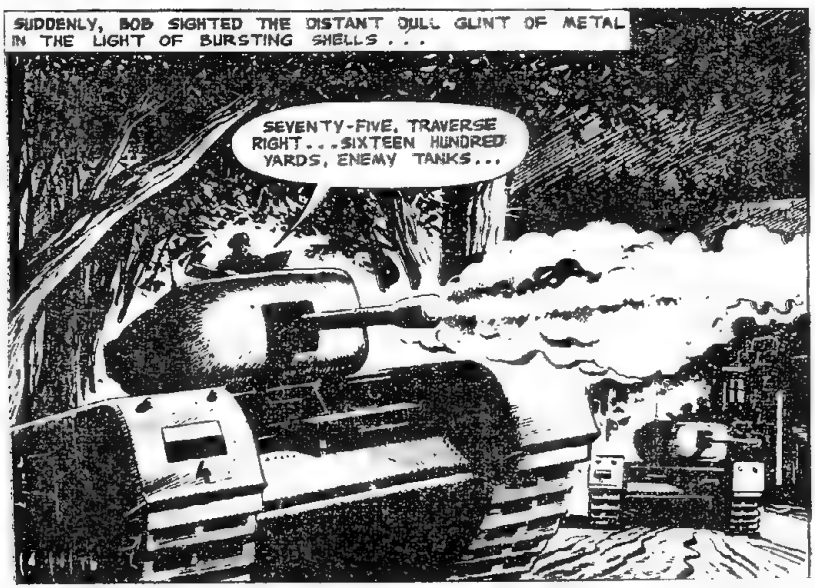
AT THAT MOMENT . . .
LISTEN !
A TANK ENGINE, SIR !

THEY LISTENED BREATHLESSLY...
COULD BE A CHURCHILL, SIR - BY THE SOUND.
AND IT COULD BE CORPORAL BIGGS IF HE'S MOVING FROM HIS POSITION...
WAIT HERE, COLES.
IT WAS A LONG SPRINT AROUND THE FARM BUILDINGS TO FIND THAT CORPORAL BIGGS HAD NOT MOVED.
THAT'S FUNNY...I COULD HAVE SWORN IT WAS WHIPPER!
A SINGLE GUNSHOT CRACKED OUT FROM THE DISTANCE - AND BOB PAUSED, STARTLED. HE SWUNG BACK TOWARDS BIGGS' TANK AT ONCE...
THUNDER! THAT WAS BACK WHERE I LEFT WARRIOR!

LIKE A FLASH, BOB SWUNG HIMSELF LITHELY ABOARD WHIPPER...TO MEET THE STARTLED FACE OF CORPORAL BIGGS.
QUICK...GET THIS THING STARTED!
Y-YES, SIR!

AND ALL TOO SLOWLY, IT SEEMED, THAT GREAT BULK CLANKED INTO MOTION. BOB GRABBED THE INTERCOM MICROPHONE...
DRIVER, LEFT!

AT LAST THEY ROUNDED THE BUILDINGS...TO SEE WARRIOR BLAZING AWAY. IN BOB'S EARPHONES CAME TROOPER COLES' GRITTED WORDS BETWEEN ROUNDS OF CRASHING FIRE...
HULLO, ABLE FIVE. WHAT'S YOUR TARGET?
ENEMY IN YON WOODS, SIR. TANKS I THINK.


SUDDENLY, BOB SIGHTED THE DISTANT DULL GLINT OF METAL IN THE LIGHT OF BURSTING SHELLS...
SEVENTY-FIVE. TRAVERSE RIGHT...SIXTEEN HUNDRED YARDS, ENEMY TANKS...

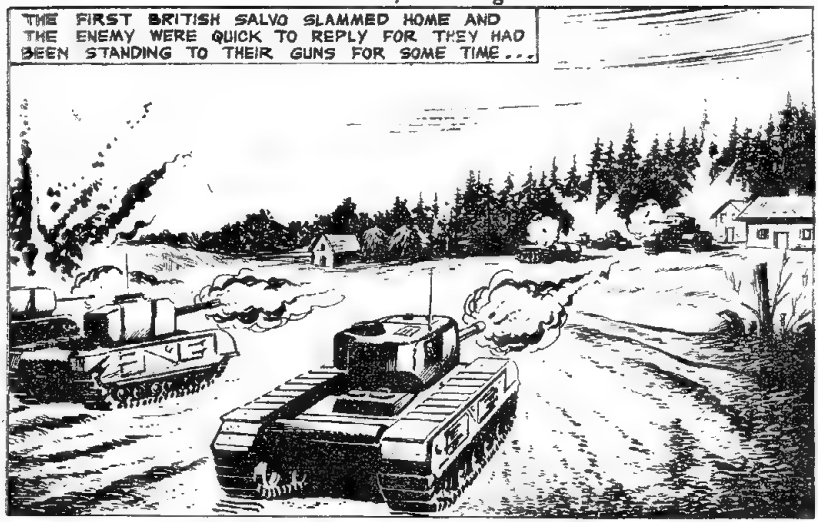
THE ADVANTAGE OF SURPRISE LOST, THE ENEMY TANK FORCE BROKE INTO THE OPEN, GUNS BLAZING. GRIM-FACED, BOB KNEW THAT HIS FEARS WERE REALISED...
THEY'RE MAKING FOR THIS FARM... JUST LIKE THE MAJOR GUESSED THEY MIGHT!

EMBOLDENED BY SUCH SLIGHT OPPOSITION, THE SIX ENEMY TANKS RACED FLAT-OUT FOR THEIR OBJECTIVE...
THE FARM BUILDINGS ARE OURS!
JA, JA! IT WILL MAKE A GOOD STRONGPOINT!

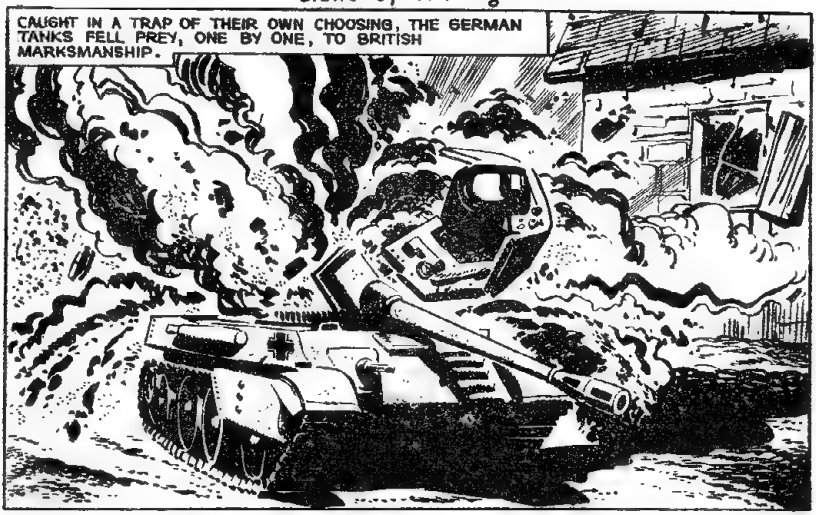
OUTNUMBERED AND OUT-GUNNED, BOB FULLER HAD NO SENSIBLE CHOICE BUT TO RETIRE TO COVER. AT THE SAME TIME HE SWITCHED TO THE 'A' SET RADIO AND ROUSED SQUADRON HEADQUARTERS.
HULLO, ABLE CONTROL. WE'RE BEING ATTACKED BY SIX ENEMY TANKS. WE'RE RETIRING TO COVER.
RIGHT. KEEP US INFORMED - WE'LL JOIN YOU.

MAJOR FOSSET ALERTED TWO AND THREE TROOP AND LED THEM TOWARDS THE DISTANT FARMHOUSE...
H'M. NO MORE SHOOTING. SPEED UP, DRIVER.

WITHIN SIGHT OF THE FARM, MAJOR FOSSET SETTLED HIS TANKS IN THE COVER ALREADY BEING USED BY FOUR TROOP ...
...BUT WHY LEAVE YOUR TANK, ANYWAY, FULLER?
WELL - SIR...
BOB KNEW HE COULD NOT ANSWER THAT ONE WITHOUT REVEALING HIS UNFOUNDED SUSPICIONS OF BIGGS...
WELL, I-I JUST THOUGHT I'D BETTER CHECK ROUND, SIR.
...AND LEFT YOUR OWN TANK WITHOUT A COMMANDER. NEVER DO THAT AGAIN, OLD CHAP.
THE MOMENT DAYLIGHT GAVE HIS GUNNERS A CLEAR VIEW OF THEIR TARGET, FOSSET OPENED THE ATTACK.


THE FIRST BRITISH SALVO SLAMMED HOME AND THE ENEMY WERE QUICK TO REPLY FOR THEY HAD BEEN STANDING TO THEIR GUNS FOR SOME TIME...

THE GERMAN CREWS FOUGHT SHELL FOR SHELL IN SURLY ANGER. THEIR ORDERS HAD BEEN TO CUT UP AN EXPECTED INFANTRY ATTACK - BUT AN ARMOURED ONSLAUGHT WAS ANOTHER MATTER...
SOMETHING IS WRONG, WE WERE NOT TOLD THERE WERE THESE ACCURSED ENGLANDER TANKS ABOUT


CAUGHT IN A TRAP OF THEIR OWN CHOOSING, THE GERMAN TANKS FELL PREY, ONE BY ONE, TO BRITISH MARKSMANSHIP.

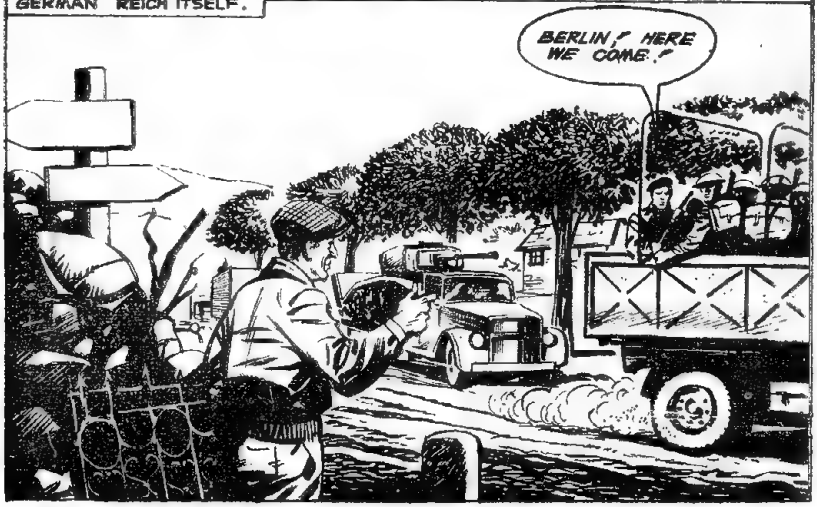
WHEN THE LAST ENEMY TANK HAD FALLEN SILENT, BOB OPENED HIS TURRET AND STARED TO HIS FLANK IN HORROR . . .
GOOD GRIEF!
TWO CHURCHILL TANKS OF UNLUCKY THREE TROOP WERE BLAZING FURIOUSLY.

ONCE AGAIN, THE DREAD CRACKLE OF FLAMES CAME TO BOB'S EARS, BRINGING A CHILL TO HIS SWEAT-SOAKED BODY. HIS MEMORY FLASHED BACK TO ITALY - TO THE DYING TANK GUNNER . . .
WHAT A WAY TO DIE !
STIFFLY DISMOUNTING, BOB SOUGHT OUT HIS OWN TANK COMMANDERS . . .
EVERYTHING OKAY, SERGEANT ? HOW ABOUT YOU, BIGGS ?
OH, F-FINE, THANKS .
MAJOR FOSSET, IT SEEMED, WAS PREPARED TO OVERLOOK BOB'S ERROR OF THE PREVIOUS NIGHT.
I FEEL ALL THIS HAS BEEN MY FAULT, SIR .
DON'T WORRY TOO MUCH, FULLER . BUT REMEMBER, IN THE FUTURE, YOU CAN'T LEAD YOUR TROOP IF YOU'RE NOT IN YOUR OWN TANK .
ANOTHER THING THAT BOB KNEW WOULD ALWAYS BE ON HIS MIND WAS THE CRACKLE OF FLAMES, THE STENCH OF BURNING OIL AND RUBBER . . .

Chapter 3. COUNTER OFFENSIVE

GIVING THE DESPERATE GERMAN DIVISIONS NO RESPITE FROM THE PUNISHING ATTACKS ALREADY DELIVERED, THE FIGHTING ALLIES KEPT UP THE PRESSURE. AT LAST, BRITISH TROOPS ONCE MORE TROD THE TRAGIC SOIL OF BELGIUM.

WITH THE TOWN OF BRUSSELS BEHIND THEM, THE BRITISH SOLDIERS PUSHED ON. AHEAD OF THEM WAS THE RHINE AND THE FRONTIERS OF THE GERMAN REICH ITSELF.



AND ON THOSE FRONTIERS WERE TO BE FOUGHT SOME OF THE BITTEREST BATTLES OF THE WAR.
THE TIME HAS COME TO TURN AND REND THE ENEMY. EAST OF COLOGNE, I AM GATHERING ENOUGH ARMOUR TO BLAST A WEDGE BETWEEN THE BRITISH AND THE AMERICANS. AND THEN...
...AND THEN WE'LL STRIKE TOWARDS THE MEUSE - SPLITTING THE ENEMY INTO SMALL GROUPS. THEN TO DESTROY THEM UTTERLY AND WITHOUT MERCY.
GER
DUSSELDORF
KOLN
BONN
COBLENZ

ON THE 16th. OF DECEMBER, WITH A FORCE OF TWENTY-FOUR DIVISIONS, TEN OF WHICH WERE ARMOURED, THE GERMAN HIGH COMMAND ATTACKED.

FIGHTING WITH FANATICAL FRENZY, THE GERMAN ARMOURED SPEARHEAD RIPPED A FORTY-MILE GAP IN THE AMERICAN FRONT LINE.
KEEP AT IT, JOE!
TANKS! THERE'S HUNDREDS OF 'EM!

BENEATH THOSE IMMENSE HAMMER-BLOWS THE STUBBORNLY-RESISTING AMERICANS WERE FORCED TO GIVE GROUND!

BY CHRISTMAS, GERMAN TANK FORMATIONS HAD PENETRATED FORTY-FIVE MILES AND OPENED UP DANGEROUS WEDGES INTO WHICH POURED THE FAST-MOVING BULK OF THE NAZI DIVISIONS.

HURRY, HURRY!
THE TERRIBLE MOMENTUM OF THE GERMAN ASSAULT WAS SWEEPING ALL RESISTANCE ASIDE, CAUSING CHAOS AND CONFUSION IN THE ALLIED LINES. DESPERATE COUNTER MEASURES WERE NEEDED...

DOWN FROM THE NORTHERN FRONT ROLLED HUGE TANK TRANSPORTERS, CARRYING UNITS OF BRITISH ARMOUR... HURRIEDLY REDEPLOYED TO PLUG THE GAP...
4

SOMEWHERE ALONG THE PONDEROUS CONVOY OF MULTI-WHEELED VEHICLES WAS FOUR TROOP...
THIS IS THE WAY TO TRAVEL! JUST SIT BACK AND ENJOY THE RIDE!
BUT ALTHOUGH THE TANKMEN ENJOYED THE LUXURY OF A LIFT, THE APPROACHING THREAT OF THE COMING BATTLE WEIGHED HEAVILY..UPON THEM ...
THEY SAY JERRY'S FITTED A HOTTED-UP GUN TO A NEW TIGER TANK -- THE ROYAL TIGER TANK THEY CALL IT.
YEAH, IT CAN SLING A TWENTY-TWO POUND SHELL, MATE. IMAGINE THAT NIPPING AROUND INSIDE, OLD WARRIOR.
THROUGH DEVASTATED VILLAGES AND DESERTED COUNTRYSIDE, THE POWERFUL COLUMN BORE DOWN UPON THE NORTHERN FLANK OF THE ENEMY'S SALIENT ...
WHILE FROM THE SOUTH RUMBLED AN AMERICAN ARMOURED DIVISION. TOGETHER, THE ALLIES HOPED TO SEVER THE ENEMY'S SPEARHEADS.

ARRIVING JUST NORTH OF LAROCHE THE BRITISH TANKS UNSHIPPED. AS BOB LED FOUR TROOP INTO LEAGUER, HE COULD HEAR THE THUNDER OF GUNS NOT MANY MILES AHEAD.
DRIVER, RIGHT! PULL IN AS CLOSE TO THE TREES AS YOU CAN.

BOB'S TANKS WERE PRESENTLY JOINED BY "A" SQUADRON AND MAJOR FOSSET CALLED A CONFERENCE ...
OKAY, EVERYBODY, GATHER ROUND... I'VE GOT SOME GEN ...

THE MAJOR'S CLIPPED TONES WERE AS COOL AS EVER...
JERRY HAS RECAPTURED SOME OF HIS OLD DEFENSIVE POSITIONS. ONE OF THESE IS A VALLEY, FIVE MILES FROM HERE. OUR JOB IS TO DRIVE HIM OUT OF THAT VALLEY AGAIN.
FOSSET POINTED TO A ROUGH SKETCH MAP PINNED TO A TREE TRUNK...
HERE'S THE VALLEY. ALONG THE BOTTOM RUNS AN ANTI-TANK TRENCH GUARDED BY CONCRETE PILL-BOXES. WE MUST SMASH THOSE PILL-BOXES SO THAT SAPPERS CAN THROW OVER BRIDGES...
1
2
6
7
A
B
C
D
E

THE REST OF THE DAY WAS SPENT IN THE PREPARATIONS FOR ACTION. GUNS WERE CHECKED, AMMUNITION LOADED, TANKS REFUELLED. AT NIGHTFALL THEY MOVED OFF, LED BY A GUIDING JEEP ...
NO LIGHTS, YOU CHAPS... CIGARETTES OUT!

BY MIDNIGHT, THE TANKS HAD TAKEN UP BATTLE POSITIONS WITHIN A WOOD OVERLOOKING THE VALLEY. BY THE FROSTY STARLIGHT THEY COULD MAKE OUT SEVERAL FEATURES OF THE DEFENCES FACING THEM...
A TOUGH NUT TO CRACK, FULLER — DRAGON'S TEETH AND CONCRETE BUNKERS!
TOUGH INDEED, SIR — WITH TIGERS BACKING THEM, NO DOUBT!

BUT "A" SQUADRON WERE NOT ALONE CONCERNED WITH TACKLING THIS FORMIDABLE BARRIER. INFANTRY WERE TO GO IN WITH THEM ...
MY CHAPS WILL BE COMING UP HARD BEHIND YOUR TANKS, MAJOR. MAKE A GOOD JOB OF THOSE PILL-BOXES SO THAT THE BRIDGES CAN BE THROWN OVER.
WE UNDERSTAND, COLONEL.
CONTROLLING THE TENSION MOUNTING INSIDE HIM, BOB WALKED OVER TO HIS OWN TROOP COMMANDERS ...
WE ATTACK AT FIRST LIGHT. WHEN WE'VE SMASHED THE PILL-BOXES, WE'LL FIRE GREEN VERE'YS FOR THE SAPPERS TO COME UP WITH THEIR BRIDGES. ANY QUESTIONS, LADS ... ?
WE KNOW THE DRILL BY NOW, SIR!
SERGEANT MCKAY GRINNED CONFIDENTLY BUT CORPORAL BIGGS WAS UNEASILY SILENT

Chapter 4. VALLEY OF FEAR

DOWN THE SLOPE ROLLED THE ARMOURED LINE ... TO MEET A FEARSOME BARRAGE OF ANTI-TANK FIRE FROM THE ENEMY STRONGPOINTS.

GERMAN SIGHTS WERE ALREADY ZEROED ON THE FAR SLOPE OF THE VALLEY AND ARMOUR-PIERCING SHELLS PUNCHED WITH DEVASTATING ACCURACY INTO THEIR TARGETS ...

THE TORNADO OF STEEL SEEMED TO COME FROM ALL DIRECTIONS AND, SCANNING THE WOODED SLOPES OPPOSITE, 808 SAW THE REASON. SWIFTLY HE REPORTED TO CONTROL...
MORE ANTI-TANK GUNS ... IN THE WOODS. OVER!
I SEE THEM.
IN RESPONSE TO MAJOR FOSSET'S ORDER, "A" SQUADRON LOOSED A SALVO OF SMOKE BOMBS, AIMED AT BLINDING THE ENEMY GUNNERS TO THE TANKS' MOVEMENTS.
TARGET NO LONGER VISIBLE, HERR LEUTNANT!
THEN FIRE BLIND .. DOLT!
UNDER COVER OF THE SMOKE, THE CHURCHILLS GOT TO WITHIN POINT-BLANK DISTANCE OF THE NAZI STRONGPOINTS, SILENCING THEM WITH MERCILESS PRECISION.
TRAVERSE RIGHT~~ RIGHT FIVE DEGREES~~ ONE MORE TO GO!

GREEN SIGNALS WERE SOON SOARING INTO THE SMOKY SKY AND IN AN AMAZINGLY SHORT TIME, THE ENGINEERS HAD FLUNG A LINE OF BRIDGES ACROSS THE YAWNING TANK TRAP. BOB LED FOUR TROOP OVER...
FOLLOW ME AND KEEP CLOSE!
HEIL HITLER

ONCE OVER THE TRENCH, "A" SQUADRON'S TASK WAS TO COVER THE ADVANCE OF THE INFANTRY WHO NOW SWARMED FORWARD...
KEEP FIRING UP AT THOSE WOODS!

THEN ABOVE THE INCREASING DIN OF BATTLE, BOB'S EARPHONES CRACKLED URGENTLY...
TANKS APPROACHING... ENEMY TANKS!
IT WAS FROM THREE TROOP ON HIS LEFT...
CALLING TO WATCHER AND WHIPPER TO STAY, BOB MOVED LEFT TO FIND THREE TROOP HOTLY ENGAGED...
SOMEBODY'S BREWING UP! LOOKS LIKE THEY NEED HELP.
THEN THROUGH THE SMOKE AND FLAME, BOB FULLER SIGHTED THE ENEMY...
GOOD GRIEF! A JERRY ROYAL TIGER!
THE MONSTER TANK'S LONG GUN-BARREL TRAVERSED MENACINGLY TOWARDS ANOTHER TARGET...

THE GUN'S MUZZLE FLAMED, AND WITH A VICIOUS CRACK A SHELL WAS FLUNG TOWARDS ONE OF THREE TROOP'S CHURCHILLS.
32

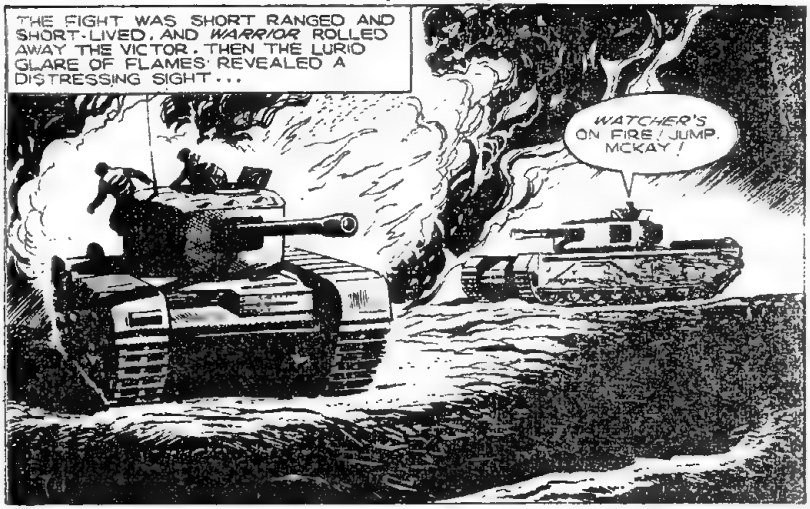
BOB WATCHED HELPLESSLY AS HE SAW WHAT THE TWENTY-POUND SHELL COULD DO TO A CHURCHILL TANK. THEN HE HEARD HIS OWN VOICE, HARSH -- BUT UNAFRAID!
TRAVERSE LEFT-- ENEMY TANK ONE-FIVE-O YARDS... FIRE!
32

BOB WAS STARTLED TO SEE A SHELL FROM HIS OWN TANK BOUNCE OFF THE ROYAL TIGER'S MASSIVE ARMOUR. THEN SMOKE SWALLOWED UP THIS HUGE ENEMY-- ONLY TO REVEAL ANOTHER, BUT THIS TIME ONE MORE OF *WARRIOR'S* OWN WEIGHT ...

FIRE!

WARRIOR'S "SEVENTY-FIVE" WAS NOW MORE EFFECTIVE. AGAIN AND AGAIN IT ROARED ...

THE GERMAN MARK IV TANK WAS HAMMERED INTO SUBMISSION ...


THE FIGHT WAS SHORT RANGED AND SHORT-LIVED, AND WARRIOR ROLLED AWAY THE VICTOR. THEN THE LURID GLARE OF FLAMES REVEALED A DISTRESSING SIGHT...
WATCHER'S ON FIRE! JUMP, MCKAY!

WITH ANGRY EYES, BOB RAKED THE SWIRLING SMOKE FOR SIGNS OF WATCHER'S ENEMY. THEN HE SAW IT...
THE ROYAL TIGER! GUNNER-- TRAVERSE LEFT-- SMARTLY-- FOR YOUR LIFE...

IN THAT ENORMOUS ARMOURED BULK, BOB FULLER SAW THE SYMBOL OF ALL THAT HE HATED ~~ RIGHT BACK TO THAT TIME ON THE ROAD TO ROME ...
THEY MURDERED MY CHAPS ... WITHOUT A CHANCE.
KEEP WITH ME, WHIPPER!
THE TURRET SWUNG ~~ ALL TOO SLOWLY ~~ FOR THE ENEMY COMMANDER HAD ALSO SIGHTED THE CHURCHILL ...
THEY FIRED ALMOST TOGETHER ~~ BUT THE BRITISH SHELL MERELY GLANCED OFF THE GERMAN'S HULL ~~ WHILE THE SHOT FROM THE TIGER'S 88 M.M. SMASHED WARRIOR'S TRACK ...
THE NEXT SHELL STRUCK THE CHURCHILL'S GUN AND CRIPPLED IT.

AT ONCE SMOKE FILLED *WARRIOR'S* INTERIOR. THROUGH A RED SWIRLING MIST, BOB SAW HIS MEN GROPING DAZEDLY TOWARDS THE HATCH.
OUT--- EVERYBODY OUT!

GIDDY WITH PAIN, BOB FORCED HIMSELF TO LOOK FOR THE ENEMY TANK ...
HE'S EDGING ROUND...FOR A... A FLANK SHOT.

THAT, AS BOB KNEW, WOULD MEAN A FRIGHTFUL DEATH FOR THEM ALL. SUDDENLY, HE REALISED THAT HE HAD BEEN WOUNDED ...
WE'RE ON FIRE!

FLAMES WERE LICKING BACK INTO THE TURRET AND ALL AT ONCE SOMETHING SNAPPED IN BOB'S MIND AND HE WAS CLAWING HIS WAY OUT OF THE HATCH, STRUGGLING TO BE FREE.
GOT TO GET OUT.

HE DROPPED TO THE GROUND, STUMBLED FROM A FRESH WRENCH OF PAIN, AND MADE OFF AT A SHAMBLING RUN ...

SOME MOMENTS LATER, THE TIGER TANK SLAMMED A MERCILESS DEATH BLOW INTO WARRIOR'S FLANK . . .
FEUER!
BOB FELL TO HIS KNEES. THEN LOOKING UP, HIS SWEAT-MISTED EYES CLEARED AND A SUDDEN UPSURGE OF WRATH SHOOK HIM. FOR THERE STOOD CORPORAL BIGGS' WHIPPER ~~ AND SHE WAS DOING PRECISELY NOTHING!
BIGGS! WHY THE DEVIL DOESN'T HE OPEN FIRE?

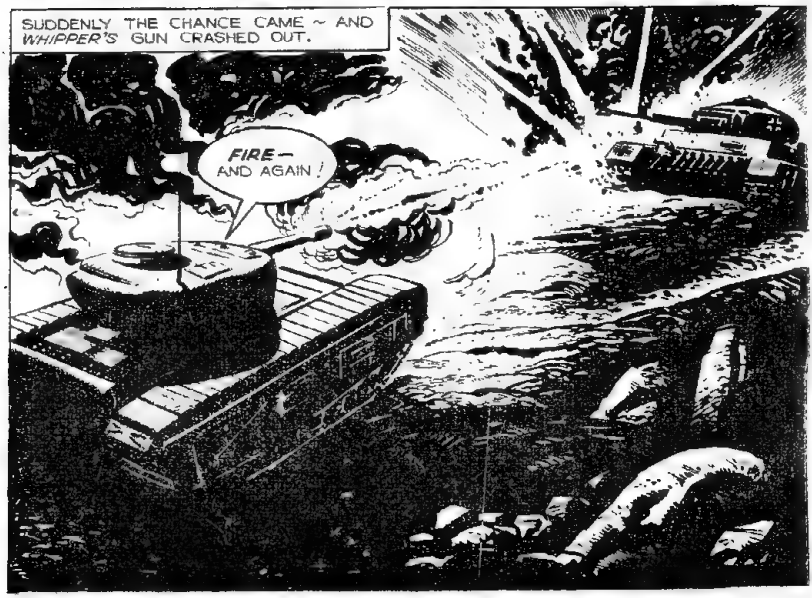
FORCING HIMSELF TO HIS FEET AGAIN, BOB STUMBLED TOWARDS THE CHURCHILL ... AN ANGRY CRY ON HIS LIPS.
BIGGS! GET YOUR TANK INTO ACTION!
WE'LL BE KILLED! WE DON'T STAND A CHANCE AGAINST THESE TIGERS!
SOMEHOW, BOB SCRAMBLED UP ON TO WHIMPER. BIGGS' EYES WERE STARING WILDLY, AND BOB RECOGNISED THE LOOK ON THE CORPORAL'S FACE. IT WAS THE SAME STARK TERROR THAT HAD BEEN THERE THOSE MONTHS BACK IN ITALY
YOU, SNIVELLING RAT! GET BACK INSIDE -- OR GET OUT OF MY WAY!
N-NO! WE'RE DONE FOR!

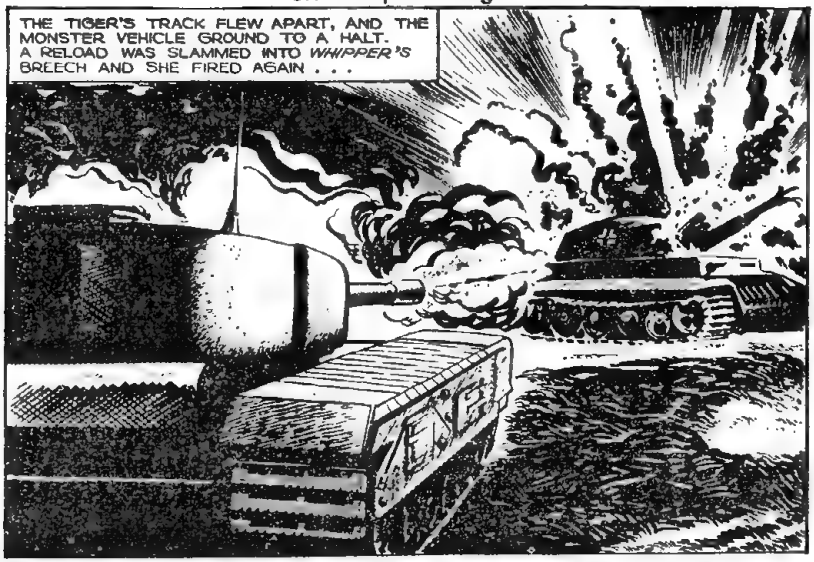
SUDDENLY, THE TIGER'S MACHINE-GUN RATTLED HARSHLY~~ A SHORT BURST~~ AND CORPORAL BIGGS' WENT LIMP...
BIGGS!

THE FRIGHTENED CORPORAL WAS DEAD. BOB KNEW THAT NOTHING COULD BE DONE FOR HIM BUT SOMETHING MUST BE DONE FOR THOSE WHO STILL LIVED!
DRIVER! GET HER MOVING! GUNNER! LOAD THE GUN!
GONE WAS BOB'S FEAR AND GONE THE PAIN. HIS ANGER AT BIGGS' COWARDICE HAD GIVEN HIM BACK HIS COURAGE. HE WOULD FIGHT~~ TO THE DEATH IF NECESSARY.

WHIPPER LURCHED INTO MOTION AND THE CHURCHILL AND HER MASSIVE AGGRESSOR BEGAN A DEADLY GAME OF TAG. BOB USED THE DRIFTING SMOKE CLEVERLY TO MANOEUVRE.
ACH! I HAVE LOST THE SWINE.
THEN THE SMOKE EDDIED AND THE TIGER'S GUNNER INSTANTLY SNATCHED HIS CHANCE. AGAIN THAT LONG SNOUT BELCHED A TAWNY FLAME . . .
GOOD! A HIT!

WHIPPER'S TRACK HAD BEEN DAMAGED BUT HER STURDY CONSTRUCTION KEPT HER MOBILE. BOB'S EYES STRAINED FOR THAT HALF-CHANCE HE NEEDED DESPERATELY~ A SHOT AT THE TIGER'S MORE VULNERABLE FLANK.
KEEP CIRCLING, DRIVER!


SUDDENLY THE CHANCE CAME ~ AND WHIPPER'S GUN CRASHED OUT.
FIRE— AND AGAIN!


THE TIGER'S TRACK FLEW APART, AND THE MONSTER VEHICLE GROUND TO A HALT. A RELOAD WAS SLAMMED INTO *WHIPPER'S* BREECH AND SHE FIRED AGAIN . . .

THE GOLIATH AMONG TANKS LAY QUIET, DEFEATED, A BLAZING HULK. AS BOB OPENED HIS TURRET, FOSSET'S VOICE CRACKLED CHEERILY IN HIS EARPHONES . . .
OKAY, EVERYBODY . . . YOU'VE DONE YOUR BIT . . . *WITHDRAW!*

THE BATTLE-WEARY BUT INDOMITABLE SURVIVORS OF "A" SQUADRON DISMOUNTED AND BOB FULLER WAS MET BY HIS CREW FROM THE BURNT-OUT *WARRIOR*.
A GOOD THING FOR US YOU JUMPED QUICK, SIR! WE WOULD HAVE BEEN ROASTED CHESTNUTS!
KNOWING THE TRUE REASON FOR HIS HURRIED EXIT, BOB COULD ONLY NOD IN SOBER THANKFULNESS.

THEY BURIED THEIR DEAD. BOB FULLER STOOD BEFORE THE LAST RESTING PLACE OF CORPORAL SIDNEY BIGGS ~ AND KNEW A HUMBLE ACKNOWLEDGMENT ~ THAT HAD IT NOT BEEN FOR THIS FEAR-HARRIED MAN HE HIMSELF MIGHT EASILY BE BRANDED A COWARD.

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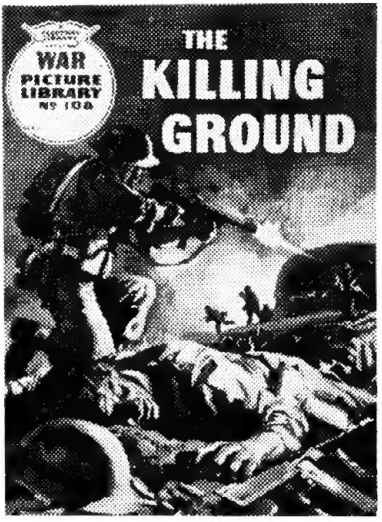

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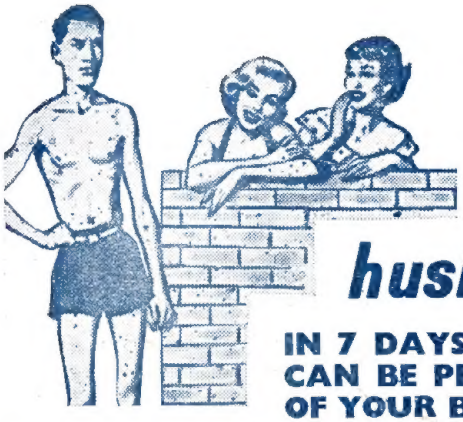

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